

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSM-03 IO-13 SSO-00
NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6199
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY JUWAIT
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
OSLO RIYADH 90
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 7981

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: MARR, SY, EG, US
SUBJ: SYRIAN REGIME SMELLS BLOOD

1. SUMMARY: THE FOREIGN MINISTRY DECEMBER 27 REFLECTED
AN AIR OF RESTRAINED JUBILATION ABOUT THE "FAILURE" OF THE
ISMAILIA TALKS. THE REGIME CONTINUES TO WHIP UP PUBLIC SUPPORT
FOR ITS CAMPAIGN AGAINST SADAT IN A SERIES OF PUBLIC RALLIES
REMINISCENT OF THE 1975 CAMPAIGN AGAINST SADAT. THE PRESS
DRIVES HOME THE POINT THAT SADAT CONTINUES TO MAKE CONCESSIONS
WHILE BEGIN GIVES NOTHING. THE FOCUS REMAINS ON SADAT WITH
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LIMITED CRITICISM OF THE US. END SUMMARY

2. DURING MY CALL ON DEPUTY FONZITHAL-KHANI THIS MORNING
THE OFFICIAL SYRIAN ASSUMPTION THAT ISMAILIA WAS A
FAILURE DOMINATED OUR DISCUSSION. HE WAS MANIFESTLY
PLEASED AT THE "EVIDENCE OF THE IMPASS" WHICH HE AVERRED
HAD NOW DEVELOPED. PERHAPS FOR THIS REASON AL-KHANI WAS NOTABLY

LESS EMOTIONAL IN DISCUSSING SADAT THAN IN OUR RECENT MEETINGS BUT THE THRUST OF HIS COMMENTS BOILED DOWN TO: SOON EVERYONE WILL REALISE THAT SADAT'S MANEUVERS, STARTING WITH THE JERUSALEM VISIT, THE CAIRO CONFERENCE, THE ISMAILIA TALKS, THE TWIN COMMITTEES, ALL HAVE BEEN MERE DELAYS IN THE PEACE PROCESS. MFA AMERICAN DIVISION DIRECTOR SHOEFI CONFIDED THAT HE FOUND HIMSELF IN A DISTINCT MINORITY AT THE MINISTRY TODAY (AS USUAL) IN ARGUING THAT ISMAILIA SHOULD NOT BE TERMED A FAILURE BUT JUST ANOTHER STEP IN THE INEVITABLY LONG PROCESS OF NEGOTIATION.

3. THE DAMASCUS REGIME HAS BEEN WHIPPING UP PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR ASSAD AGAINST SADAT. THE LATEST IN THE ROUND OF PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS OCCURRED TODAY IN HAMA. WELL-ORGANIZED CROWDS AGAIN TOOK TO THE STREETS CHANTING THEIR SLOGANS, "SADAT, NO. HAFEZ, YES." IT IS LOOKING MORE AND MORE LIKE THE CAMPAIGN OF 1975 AS CITY AFTER CITY MOUNTS WELL-ORCHESTRATED DEMONSTRATIONS CULMINATING IN A BOILER ROOM HARANGUE BY A MEMBER OF THE PARTY. A CAMPAIGN IS EVEN TAKING PLACE IN THE CHURCHES AS PRESS REPORTS THAT DERA'A'S CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY DENOUNCED SADAT'S "CAPITULATIONIST STAND" IN SERMONS ON SUNDAY GREEK ORTHODOX PATRIARCH ELIAS JOINED THE ATTACK AT CHRISTMAS EVE MASS. AND ISMAIL FAHMY IS QUOTED AS SAYING: "SADAT'S VISIT HAS ALTERED THE STRATEGIC ELEMENTS OF THE CONFLICT. ISRAEL WILL GIVE NOTHING TO SADAT."

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4. MEANWHILE, AN AL-BAATH EDITORIAL DEC 27 CALLED SADAT "THE ARAB QUISLING", THE BAATH EDITORIAL POINTS OUT THAT SADAT AND BEGIN, BY ESTABLISHING POLITICAL COMMITTEE IN JERUSALEM, HAVE REEMPHASIZED THE POINT THAT EGYPT RECOGNIZES JERUSALEM AS THE CAPITAL OF THE "ZIONIST STATE." THE PAPER SAYS THAT THE ONLY RESULT OF THE ISMAILIA SUMMIT IS THAT BOTH SADAT AND BEGIN AGREED TO CONTINUE THE NEGOTIATIONS. "BEGIN, BECAUSE NEGOTIATIONS MASK HIS INTENT TO HOLD ON TO THE TERRITORIES FOREVER; SADAT, BECAUSE CONTINUING THE NEGOTIATIONS MASKS HIS FAILURE." THE EDITORIAL CHARACTERIZES SADAT AS AGREEING TO EVERYTHING BEGIN WANTED WHILE GETTING NOTHING IN RETURN.

5. AL-THAWRA SAYS THAT SADAT IS BEING TOTALLY MANIPULATED BY THE ISRAELIS. THE STRATEGY IS ATTRIBUTED TO AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN BEGIN AND PRESIDENT CARTER TO SEEK A SEPARATE SOLUTION. THAWRA SAYS THERE IS SIGNIFICANCE IN THE ARRIVAL OF THE WEST BANK DELEGATION AND SADAT'S TALK OF THE PLO EXCLUDING ITSELF FROM THE "ATMOSPHERE OF SETTLEMENT" FOR HAVING TAKEN WHAT THE PAPER TERMED A "NATIONAL AND ARAB POSITION." IN ANOTHER EDITORIAL, AL-THAWRA SAID THE ARAB PEOPLE FROM THE GULF TO THE ATLANTIC OCEAN NEVER EXPECTED THAT THE DAY WOULD COME WHEN

ZIONISTS WOULD TREAD ON EGYPT IN PEACE AND IN WELCOME: "DAYAN SAID HE WAS IN A DREAM BUT WE SAY THE ARABS ARE IN A NIGHT-MARE." THE EDITORIAL SAYS THAT THE ISRAELIS WILL CONTINUE TO BE OBDURATE WHILE SADAT WILL CONTINUE TO BETRAY THE ARAB CAUSE AND GIVE CONCESSIONS, ONE AFTER THE OTHER DESPITE HIMSELF.

6. TISHRIIN FOCUSES ON BEGIN'S STATEMENT THAT SADAT AGREED ISRAEL'S 1968 "AGGRESSION" WAS REALLY A WAR OF DEFENSE. EDITORIAL NOTES THAT BEGIN SAID "ISRAEL CANNOT ACCEPT EGYPTIAN DEMAND CALLING FOR A PALESTINIAN STATE. THUS, ONCE AGAIN SADAT HAS MADE CONCESSIONS WHILE BEGIN HAS MADE NONE". ISRAEL, ACCORDING TO THIS EDITORIAL, IS MORE INTRANSIGENT TODAY THAN IT WAS BEFORE THE SADAT VISIT. AS FOR US PRESSURE, THE EDITORIAL QUOTES BEGIN SAYING:"THE US HAS

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REJECTED THE CONCEPT OF ESTABLISHING A PALESTINIAN STATE." THE CONCLUSION--THAT CONCESSIONS TO ISRAEL LEAD TO MORE CONCESSIONS.

7. COMMENT: THE PRESS, LIKE THE DEMONSTRATIONS IN HAMA, FOCUSED ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY ON SADAT'S "FAILURE" AND BEGIN'S "GAINS." THERE IS LITTLE CRITICISM OF THE US ROLE AND NO CRITICISM OF THE STATUS OF OTHER ARAB STATES, INCLUDING JORDAN AND SAUDI ARABIA. THE INTENSITY OF THE CAMPAIGN IS, IF ANYTHING, INCREASING.

MURPHY

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